

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION**

*Please replace paragraph [0002] with the following amended paragraph:*

[0002] Usually, a surgeon first attaches the screws to the spine in appropriate positions, then attaches each screw to a spinal rod and determines where to place the connectors. However, a curvature of the spine and limited available space sometimes results in such an alignment of the screws that a connector must be skipped at a position where the surgeon would place it otherwise. This can happen when linear distance between two adjacent screws ~~is insufficient~~ is insufficient for fastening a connector to the rod.

*Please replace paragraph [0055] with the following amended paragraph:*

[0055] A spinal fixation assembly of the present invention generally includes one or more bone anchors which are implanted through a portion of a vertebra, for example, the ~~pedicle, lamina~~ pedicle, lamina, or lateral mass of the vertebra. The bone anchors, described in detail below, may be connected by a spinal fixation element, such as, for example a rod, plate, or cable. The spinal fixation element extends generally along the axis of the spine to fix one or more vertebrae of the spine. One or more connecting plates, described in detail below, can be attached to the bone anchors. These connecting plates can be attached to the bone anchors implanted on opposing sides of the spine, thus providing additional stability to the assembly. In one embodiment, the connecting plate can protect the spinal cord after a full or partial laminectomy. The term "distal", as used in the instant disclosure, means farther from the surgeon, facing into the body; the term "proximal" means closer to the surgeon, facing out of the body.

*Please replace paragraph [0081] with the following amended paragraph:*

[0081] Now referring to FIGS. 14A and B, in one embodiment, the present invention is a method of decompression of the spinal canal. The method comprises the steps of making a first dissection 204 in posterior element 200 of a vertebra; positioning posterior element 200 of the vertebra to expand spinal ~~canal 202~~ canal 202; and maintaining the position of posterior element 200 with a connecting plate (106 or 130) coupled to bone anchor 102 fastened to the vertebra. In one embodiment, posterior element 200 is a portion of the lamina of the vertebra. In another embodiment, posterior element 200 is the spinous process of the vertebra.